ON THE ROAD

THE SCARS: attention shoppers

Virginia Turbett

Scarred for life

The Scars/Another Pretty Face/The Visitors/Josef K
Edinburgh

TO CALL the George Square Theatre a hovel would be an insult to most self-respecting hovels. Seated venues are bad enough but sloping seated venues with 'No Smoking' signs and refreshment provisions consisting of a solitary drinking tap in the bogs are surely more than most civilised folk could bear. Saturday night far from home, suffering from Johnny Waller and the violent pangs of alcohol withdrawal symptoms . . . and to think, lazy divs like John Lydon accuse us of having it easy. Bah.

Like a lot of young bands today Josef K suffer from an overbearing Doors fixation. Luckily for them most of their audience are teeny sprats who only connect the name with a rather large blonde lady and probably think Jim Morrison is the eighth man in the Blunt-Bindon-Khashoggi affair.

Like Joy Division however, Josef K are one of the few new bands digging deep into the dim recesses of grim with sparkle and ingenuity, and you can't help thinking that underneath it all they're probably quite nice blokes who love their mums and watch The Big Match *on a Sunday afternoon.*

They're not what you'd call a good grin — the deadly dry wake-paced numbers they yawned through at first with the vocalist's Lou Reed impersonations working at Maximum Yarwood level, weren't exactly my idea of a fun night out — but when they get into top gear they're transformed into a driving unit of intense power.

Next up were the appalling Visitors dismissed in my Scotland meisterwerk on the basis of their meaningful single ('Electric Heat Reflects My Feet' or something) who were if anything worse than I'd imagined, the singer barking private hang-ups over another tuneless synthesised racket, something akin to the Stranglers without tunes.

Truthfully the best thing to happen during their set was a vicious attack on my person by their erstwhile manager, the aforementioned Waller, and his skinhead compatriot screaming "Call this New Musik" at me. Dispatching them with a masterly display of origami I replied "Too bleeding right" and went up the back to await Another Pretty Face.

APF, or 'Springsteen meets the Clash' as we call them (a technical term you needn't concern yourselves with), are the subject of a lengthy dissertation by my good self in next week's action-packed issue of New Year Sounds *fun so I'll just comment that live their heavy heavy* monster *sized rock sound more than fulfills the promise of the rehearsals I caught in October and their under-rated first single 'All The Boys Love Carrie'.*

Because of disgraceful back-stage politicking APF missed out on their encore and in the short interval I had to prepare myself for the very different, much less orthodox approach of the Scars while being sidetracked by the intricacies of Waller's dubious love life and the activities of an 'orrible bearded hippy who took to flinging himself the length and breadth of the hall for no apparent reason, thus upping the undoubted weirdness quota of the gig and setting the scene rather well for the Scars who despite some early untogetherness due to months of gigless meditation presented a staggering set of jagged postpunk power.

Fronted by Rab King looking like a muppet with his face hid behind a mop-top mass of curly Yorkshire Terrier hair, the Scars constructed an often breathtaking brand of innovative rock built primarily on Paul Research's searing and soaring fiercely pyrotechnic guitar excursions cutting and swathing a path through audience conservatism over the unexpectedly disco-rhythm orientation of John Mackie's bass and Calumn Mackey's drumming and offset by the equally demonic vocals of the theatrical King — one of those love or hate eccentric sneers much loved by the postpunk school. No middle ground here, no need for it.

Startling sometimes, abrasive often and yet irresistibly attractive, the Scars' ten song ranged from the beautiful unconventional rock of the single, through the sinister, atmospheric roll of 'They Came And Took Her' to the very disco (plus!) 'Beat Goes On' and the chilling encore, a musical marshland setting for a stunning rendition of a nuclear horrorshow poem 'Your Attention Please' which ends with Paul's guitar alone belching and choking on its own poisoned vomit. . .

. . . . The Scars are innovators, they deal in dark pop that is startling and commercial. The only thing that bothers me about them is their pretensions, their arrogance and sense of self-importance, their dodgy, sometimes overbearing dramatics. I think they'd love to be written about like the Banshees. I think this is a dangerous trap for them to fall into. I think they could mean much more and actually snap the bondage pant barriers of the postpunk mentality.

I'm reminded of my other favourite 'postpunk' band the very wonderful U2 and their vocalist Bono's openness and exuberance which just sweeps away all the shadowy pretence of the Adam Ant school, and is a much more 'meaningful' model to aim for.

Come into the open, Scars, there's a whole world out here.

GARRY BUSHELL

Holly And The Italians
101 Club

THIS BAND are gonna shift a bit of vinyl for sure. A very imminent Oval 45. 'Tell That Girl To Shut Up' is a statement of intent which by, say, the third in the series should yield a hit. Incidentally, by then they won't be with Oval anymore.

For a trio, they produce an adequate web of sound based wholly on kick and run post-punk tactics. Native Angeleno Holly Valentine is a small, slender guitarist/vocalist not prone to pose as jailbait or schoolgirl submissive. Try as she may, doubtless she'll still end up on the *Sounds* letters page anyway.

Instead, leather pants and suede boots are mere accessories. Treading the boards, she exudes a persona midway between the I'm-gonna-be-famous Chrissie Hynde and stagefright. No attempt is made to dominate the gig. Holly just gives it to yer straight. Hidden behind a Strat, she plays only what's demanded, simplistic lead kept to a minimum. The result is that ex-Boyfriend Mark Henry and Holly's fellow American Steve Young on drums have to play their arses off filling the spaces normally reserved for banks of synthesisers.

Not surprisingly, the 45 is their best number, a killer of a chorus betraying a slippin' 'n' slidin' melody that comes as pure aural relief at the butt end of a hard punchy verse. 'Youth Coup' follows a similar pattern, boasting a riff that's a close relative of the Kinks' 'You Really Got Me'.

As the set develops, the band's attack is limited but undeniably effective. Next up is 'Chapel Of Love', the old Dixie Cups' love song. Stripped of innocence, it has an eerie feel, a reaffirmation of Seventies cynicism, the delivery jacked up really high, the band firing on all cylinders.

The Real Kids' 'All Kindsa Girls' finishes the evening, Holly leading the Italians into the number via a straight lift from the shambolic Faces songbook.

One swift encore and it was all over. It had been a difficult set with instruments wandering in and out of time but they eventually won a crowd that, at first, had been totally disinterested.

For the future some solid gigging is needed, and the collective confidence to put the material across. If they choose to sit it out on the sidelines, they might find themselves overtaken by the competition.

CHRIS RYAN

Roger Chapman
Newcastle

STOCKY, BALDING and wearing red petrol pump attendant overalls Roger Chapman looks more like Tony Hancock than a rock'n'roll frontman as he grins and staggers back and forth like a drunken navvy. The Short List also smile a lot and never miss a note. This is the real thing; musicians who for the most part earn their daily crusts by following the dots going out on the road and having as much fun as it's possible to have standing up.

They're a powerhouse that would be hard to fault, so put 'em together for Geoff Whitehorn (guitar), Tim Hinckley (keyboards) Nick Pentelow (sax), girlie chorus Kathy McDonahue and Helen Hardy and the super-tight rhythm section of Jerome Rimson and Stretch.

Expectations of finding Chappo's vocals on the irritating side — Larry The Lamb and all that — are quickly dashed. He only really ventures into Toytown for 'Midnight Child', but because he's a stylist who sings from the heart rather than from the brain or wallet even that doesn't seem contrived. No two ways about it, Roger Chapman is one hell of a singer. His voice carries more authority than a platoon full of sergeant majors. And in that way Chapman pisses all over Van Morrison whose rock'n'soul is probably the nearest reference point to the area that he's currently working in. Chapman is no prima donna, reluctantly trooping out his wares for the customers. He means it and convinces without trying.

Which is not to say that there aren't blind spots. 'You Can't Get In' is spun out and tedious. A set with the fire that the Short List effortlessly punch out shouldn't be diluted by a 15 minute showcase of solos. A slowie like 'My Friend The Sun' would have been a better piece of shade amongst the hell for leather light of the other material. Whatever. Reservations aside there can be no doubt that Chapman and the Short List are one of the classiest and most persuasive combos around.

What a bloody great lad!

IAN RAVENDALE

Laugh? I could have died

Killing Joke
Hope And Anchor

THE TROUBLE with Killing Joke is that they suffer from an acute lack of imagination.

You just cannot ignore the blatant plagiarism and shallowness inherent in the band. Perpetrating Sid Vicious imagery over laborious guitar work-outs, their stance is ultimately no stance at all and unless they pull their socks up pretty smartish they are going to be shot to pieces in a hail of understandable ridicule.

Which I can't help feeling is a bit of a pity, because while the majority of the material is nothing short of abysmal they do produce a couple of surprisingly good tunes in their defence as well as boasting a neat line in honky-tonk electronics.

The opening number is one of those good tunes. Sprightly axe work shadowed with heavily echoed vocals. Quite a little skull-cruncher. I didn't catch the title but no matter; it was an impressive start. Looks like a good set thought I ... oh well, we all make mistakes. What followed was a sloppy, monotonous mess that finally heaved up an insulting dirge called 'Malicious Boogie'. Tripe consisting of some bozo hollering disco whoop-whoops over endless riffing. A humorous bunch of jackals, eh kids?

While there was little visually to hold one's attention, I did derive a great deal of amusement from the keyboard vocalist, who grit his teeth to much effect and displayed considerable control over his eyebrows switching from grimaces of desperation to hostility with skilful ease.

'Nuclear Boy' and 'Animal' pluck them back from the depths, both being competent songs with a veering towards heavy metal. Providing a neat lead in to their final and finest moment. There can be little doubt that 'Are You Receiving' is a real beaut, with its pounding, plangent beat and economic keyboards. Though lacking the tightness of its recorded sibling it still moves. Which is more than can be said of some of their earlier drivel. Let's hope more songs of this calibre are forthcoming. The superficiality must be rejected in favour of something more honest.

I just hope you guys can take some constructive criticism because I would hate to see a band with a name as good as Killing Joke go down the tubes.

STEVE KEATON

Camping out in the cold

The Tours
Moonlight

FRUSTRATING LOT the Tours. Hints of things worthwhile abound, but you just can't see 'em for looking. There's some indefinable appeal about them which is lost behind a sheen of blandness.

Tonight they managed a 20 song strong set and I'll be darned if I could distinguish more than about four to any degree from the woolly collection. Umpteen reflections of a single idea; neither experimentation nor variety were to be seen.

A rather undemanding instrumental, 'Jimmy' introduced the band and successfully predicted the shape of things to come. A fistful of songs deep and it becomes evident that the lyrics are more interesting than the songs themselves. Often keen observations are lost in the weaker musical backdrop. The Virgin single 'Tourist Information' turns up early and shows the boys in their best light. Bobbing lead complemented by Ronnie Mayor's flowing vocal. A neat pop single by any standards.

But it all wears a bit thin when the bulk of the set appears to be nought but re-runs of the same thing. Richard Mazda swops vocals with Mayor throughout but lacks individuality and the changing is rendered ineffectual, his guitar work on the other hand is fine, if restrained stuff. 'Sad Thing', 'Last One' and 'Love On The Rebound' are worthy of note, all pleasant cheerful efforts. Well wrought and danceable which one feels is the intention. An uninspired cover of the aged 'Can't Explain' is a tedious addition to the set. They do little to it, and of greater importance it does very little for them.

It must be said that tonight was hardly an ideal gig on which to assess any group, the normally snug confines of the Moonlight had become an arctic wasteland devoid of life as we know it and the sound was cloudy at best. So it's to their credit that they carried on regardless in an attempt to amuse those eskimos present.

By far the best number of the night was the debut vinyl 'Language School' which actually seemed to benefit from the rigidity of their songwriting. A wonderfully effective tune with a strong melody, uncluttered and precise. This drifts into the less impressive 'Foreign Girls', then they submerge once again into a Loch of faceless gloss. It's all a bit like camping out in search of Nessie. Any sightings of substance have vanished before they can be confirmed. 'I Lose Control' is the final turn of an overlong set. . I'm sure there's a creature of quality somewhere in the Tours, it's just a question of anticipating its emergence. Will it be worth the wait though?

STEVE KEATON

Toyah/Boys/Teenbeats
Music Machine

PICTURE THIS. The Music Machine is comfortably filled with punks, mods and normals, and every so often one of them attempts to enter the small stage bar only to be thrust back by one of three beefy heavies because he doesn't possess a 'special' invite. That bar is itself crammed to overflowing with music biz liggers who, despite the lack of any free food, drink or perks, are resting in the supercilious satisfaction that *they* do not have to stand with the common horde.

Thus, apart from a few intrepid drinkers, none of them leave their 'allocated area' and the elitist sheep do not mingle with the punters. Still, it's a Merry Christmas to you all at Safari Records' free party — the first turkey and crackers lig of the season — and at least the bands are good.

I arrive to the sound of the Teenbeats, only I don't immediately recognise them 'cos they sound so much stronger and heavier and better than their last wimpy showing. My God, they're growing up! Singer Huggy looks so damned uncomfortable in his mohair suit and the general playing is so alien to power pop Seventies mod that I'd swear the Teenbeats are gonna be mods for only a few weeks more.

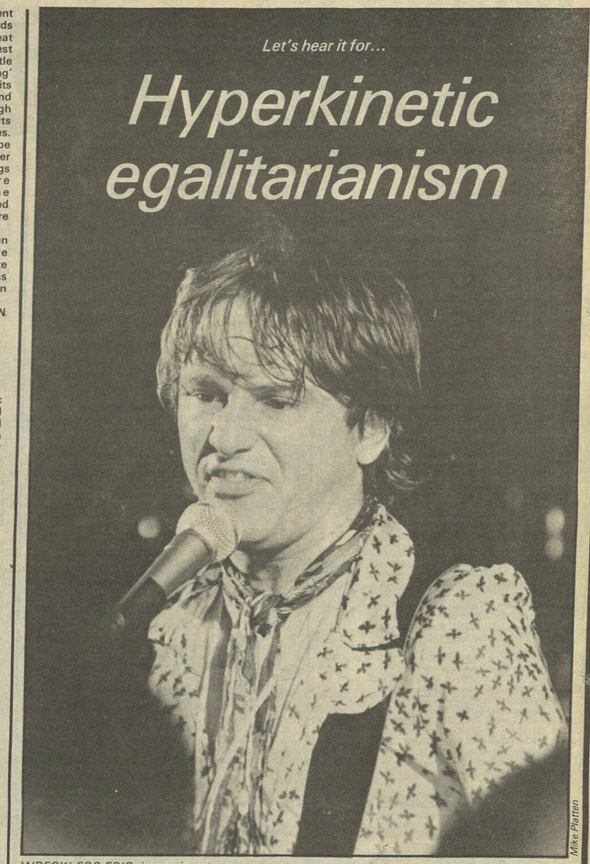
The Boys are the epitome of that cliche, the 'good time band'. They look and sound deliciously blatant and brash, and are ideal for a party where everyone's going to get pissed and ignore the band anyway unless they're forced to watch. The Boys *do* force people to watch — to dance as well — by their exuberence and charmingly scuffy whining guitar riffs. They must *love* the Heartbreakers, admitting to it in every song from the well-worn favourite 'Brickfield Nights' to the new motorbiking single 'Kamikaze' and the brilliantly raunchy semi-slowie 'Independent Girl'.

There's one hell of a lot of tidying up to be done around the set — more than in the *Sounds* office even — but if they did that then the Boys would be boring. Right now they stand for *fun* and although there may be doubt that they can make a comeback at this point in time, I'll wish them the very best of luck.

Toyah is brilliantly odd, or oddly brilliant. Either hated or loved, she yells and yodels and screams and sings and puts such total effort into her performance that she eventually leaves the stage with her bra hanging around her neck. Toyah's odd-bod band back her rantings with amusing confidence and coolness pitching to climax with the ethereal swoops of 'Neon Womb'.

The finale involves ebullient compere Gary Holton and the Boys (again!) with stockings over their heads. The incognito approach is understandable as they proceed to yell perverted forms of Christmas carols (I think) and everyone's too pissed to give a damn anyhow. But a happy New Year all the same.

ROBBI MILLAR



Let's hear it for...

Hyperkinetic egalitarianism

WRECKLESS ERIC: impervious to reason

Mike Platten

Wreckless Eric
New York

THE ROD Stewart that so many of us used to love for his brawling smile, for his loose, drunken music, for his proletariate stage persona — in short; the Rod Stewart who used to mug around with the Faces circa 1972 — is alive, well and still throwing up the morning after in the form of Wreckless Eric. Wreckless is the most delightfully tawdry triple shot of scotch this side of (more recently) Herman Brood, and as such his live shows are truly reason to celebrate (by getting sloshed, of course).

His gig at New York's Hurrah was his first solo show in the US, having appeared before only in the Stiff showcase presentation at the Bottom Line in December of '78. CBS in the US snapped up all the Stiffs but Wreckless, but now he's finally got a deal over here so we can see him glug it down on our own turf. Wreckless was a bit more low-key than at that historic Bottom Line show, which is to say he was only 'up' enough to give new meaning to the word hyperkinetic. His singing was as sleazy as every, with those deep wolfman yowls that seem to surprise even him and those deceptively cute, quieter intros in songs like 'Whole Wide World' — which is catchy and touching to boot.

Besides his voice, another of Eric's finest effects are those black marble eyes of his, which seem totally impervious to reason. It's the 'just one more drink' mentality taken to extremes. His vocal patterns are relentlessly witty with nary and nudge-nudge even a wink needed to help it along. It's all such natural abandon, while still remaining as much a cliché as a master of ceremonies smashing a lampshade over his head (a quaint American custom). As such it's absolutely wonderful rock 'n' roll.

Highlights included a new number called 'The Pop Song', which steals a riff from 'Day Tripper', plus the hysterical 'Veronica', which makes any form of British accent sound funnier to these American ears than anything since Monty Python. Also, his 'I Wish It Would Rain' is a great way of dealing with the blues; by making it clear that he's too far into gonzo land to even know he's got them!

Above all, though, is Eric's egalitarianism. It's something David Johansen has a lot of, Syl Sylvaine has a bit of, and Rod Stewart used to have in abundance, way back before he had to ask if we thought he was sexy. It's an ability to make the audience feel completely at ease and quite equal — the perfect pub sensibility. Hopefully Wreckless Eric can carry this intimate sense with him all the way to major concert headlines here in The States.

JIM FARBER

Here And Now/Essential Bop
Bristol

EASING OUR way out of the bar into the hall isn't easy, we seem to be encountering a no room to move situation. Strange, 'cos I can see acres of space down towards the front — why don't these people move forwards? Ah, now I see why — they're all sitting down on the floor. Jesus, I haven't seen this sort of thing happen for years. Could this mean that the indoor festival is back?

Well, fortunately not, the first blast of Essential Bop shifts most of them from horizontal to vertical hold and keeps them that way. And why shouldn't it? The band play fast, aggressive, modern music with Sixties throwbacks, flying bass, intriguing and efficient lead, a little rising organ to add that Doors/Iron Butterfly touch.

Steve Bush tops the whole thing off with some anarchistic antics on vocals. Leastways, that's how he'd prefer it to read, instead he comes on snide and intense. This probably isn't serious, but that's the way it feels. His approach to warming up an audience instinctively raises hackles instead of cheers even when you don't catch most of what he says. However, it's the tonal quality of his voice — dry, cold and insinuating — that catches the attention.

If Essential Bop lighten up a little and make a concentrated effort to communicate they should go far.

Survival in the pursuance of an ideal is Here And Now's prime motive. The idea is that you can live life to the full by just covering the costs and forgetting the profits. To this end they play free concerts (always) and sell records for around £2.50 to £3 — unless they're blackmailing some obscure superstar with keenly remembered sordid flashbacks, then they exist from day to day solely on your generosity when the hat gets passed around (as it always is).

Why this is truly revolutionary! I hear you may exclaim. The, er, essence of punk or something — there's a real human story there, why hasn't *Sounds* done a feature on these people?' Well, I suppose the short answer is that they bore the pants off most impartial observers.

Reminiscent of Gong and Soft Machine for those on uppers and of the Pink Fairies for those of downers, Here And Now also add a touch of speed, hoping to inject a little New Wave energy to give them viability.

Sorry fellahs, your motives are impeccable but the end product (and that's what it's all about, isn't it?) just doesn't cut it.

RAB